

SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND LUNCH EDUCATION/PROMOTION

ISSUE

The main issue is how school breakfast and school lunch is perceived by students, parents, school staff, school administrators, and the community. In general, most believe that school breakfast and lunch is for economically challenged individuals and that the food is below standard. Thus creating the perception that school breakfast and lunch is only for the poor which perpetuates a negative perception of school meals and increases negative social stigma. For many students school breakfast and lunch may be the only nutritional meals that they receive on a daily basis; when school is in session. Therefore, focusing efforts on educating key stakeholders on promoting the positive aspects of schools meals will likely increase participation in school breakfast and lunch.

In 2008, the California Project LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition) developed a Formative Research Report “Engaging Parents and Stakeholders in School Wellness” and reported the following:

Why parents participate:

- To be informed (about school events/activities, treatment of the child at school, child’s friends and academic progress of the child).
- Volunteering makes parents feel good.
- To show they care (about child’s health and education).
- Feel it’s their duty

What would get parents involved:

- Incentives (such as food, childcare, gift cards, raffle prizes, and discounted trip tickets).
- Input valued and validated; parents being treated as equals and as partners with school personnel.
- Caring, compassionate, warm and welcoming environment.

Barriers to parent participation:

- Work
- Lack of childcare
- Time
- Language barriers
- Don’t care
- Lack of transportation
- Feel of inadequacy
- Lack of respect/opinions not valued

Gaps in parent’s knowledge about Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP):

- Very few are knowledge about LSWP

Ways parents are interested in becoming involved:

- Conducting surveys and administering taste tests
- Volunteering for physical activity for after-school programs
- Attending and discussing health-related topics in group meeting and workshops
- Attending school board meeting or speaking to school board members
- Introducing healthy fundraising ideas
- Soliciting parent involvement

Optimal methods for communicating with parent:

- Personal phone calls
- Print media
- Incentives
- Email
- Back to school/open house
- Automated phone calls
- Parent-teacher conference
- Parent coordinator on staff
- Parent-parent communication
- Conduct workshops that satisfy basic needs

Limited research is available on best practices for educating/promoting school breakfast and lunch, so we have adapted the “Best Practices In Education” from the State Education Resource Center website which is supported by the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut Vanguard Schools Initiative. They identified the following nine standards:

- **1: A Clear and Common Focus**

Develop a clear and common focus on promoting participation in school breakfast and lunch. In high-performing schools, administrators, teachers, students, and parents share and commit to clearly articulated and understood common goals.

- **2: High Standards and Expectations**

Develop standards and expectations which promote nutrition education and promoting participation in school nutrition programs such as school breakfast and school lunch.

- **3: Strong Leadership**

School leadership is focused on enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of the people in the organization and creating a common culture of high expectations based on the use of skills and knowledge to improve the performance of all students. Leadership fosters a collaborative atmosphere between the school and the community while establishing positive systems to improve participation in school breakfast and school lunch.

- **4: Supportive, Personalized, and Relevant Learning**

Develop supportive environments that provide positive personalized relationships for all students and can promote participation in school breakfast and lunch.

- **5: Parent/Community Involvement**

Foster parents and community members to help develop, understand, and support a clear and common

focus on improving participation in school breakfast and lunch. The focus can be on improving the quality of the meals served and encouraging all students to participate in school breakfast and lunch. The school community works together to actively solve problems and create win-win solutions such as removing the negative stigma associated with eating school meals.

6: Monitoring, Accountability, and Assessment

Utilize and interpret school breakfast and lunch data to adjust and improve menus, serving times, and meal service options.

7: Curriculum and Instruction

Encourage nutrition education at all levels and support a clear and consistent message.

- **8: Professional Development**

Provide training for school staff to ensure that students, parents, and the community receive a clear and consistent message regarding nutrition and participation in school breakfast and lunch. Promote schools meals as the healthy choice to support academic success.

- **9: Time and Structure**

High-performing schools are flexibly structured to maximize the use of time and accommodate the varied lives of their students, staff, and community in order to ensure that students have access and adequate time to consume meals.